

Real Life choices

The New Jersey Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD) introduces **Real Life Choices**, a new way to better assist families caring for members with developmental disabilities at home. **Real Life Choices** represents a system change that provides services and supports, while reassuring families that – should their needs change – the system will provide for those changing needs.



Families at Real Life Choices Meeting



Real Life Choices, the blueprint announced in the fall of 2002, recognizes that a large majority of people with disabilities live with their families and wish to do so as long as possible. Yet few supports and services are available to assist families in caring for relatives at home. **Real Life Choices** provides assistance so families can remain together for as long as possible while ensuring that – as their needs change – a residential option would be available.

The Division has four goals for implementing this program:

- Equity in the distribution of resources and services
- Family and Individual decision-making
- Allocation of comparable resources for comparable levels of need
- Development of individual budgets based on support needs

“This is the first time that DDD has put the power with the families, which is very encouraging.”

*Family Member at
Real Life Choices Meeting*

The Division is now in the early stages of a multi-year plan to bring **Real Life Choices** to all New Jersey residents with developmental disabilities.

Once fully implemented, **Real Life Choices** will work with individuals, families and service providers throughout the state to ensure the most personalized and responsive service plan for each person.



“This opens up a whole new array of choices— I don’t even know where to start.”

*Family Member at
Real Life Choices Meeting*

New Jersey’s Department of Human Services’ Division of Developmental Disabilities is working on new ways to help individuals and families who seek services. The Division’s multi-year plan – ***Real Life Choices*** – provides needed services and supports while the individual is living at home. It provides lifelong planning for individuals and families, while ensuring that additional services, including residential, are there if needed.

The Division serves more than 30,000 persons a year – nearly double the number of consumers we served a decade ago and, on average, a much younger group than we served previously. Most of the families we serve would prefer to keep their family member at home rather than place them in a residential setting or group home. In fiscal year 2003, however, only 6.6% of the Division’s \$1 billion budget was dedicated to helping individuals who live with their families.

To respond both to consumer requests and current inequities in resource allocation, as well as state and national trends in service delivery, the Division has launched a multi-year plan to:

- increase programs and supports for people with disabilities living with their families. Collect information from those on the caseloads to anticipate their needs.
- increase federal reimbursement to New Jersey and reinvest it in expanded services by requiring that everyone apply for the Community Care Waiver prior to entering a waiver service.
- increase the portion that individuals contribute from their own federal benefits to the cost of care in group homes and supervised apartments in order to further support expanded services throughout the state.

Real Life Choices will empower individuals and families to make decisions about their needs and provide them with greater flexibility in identifying the services they need and want. Help for families will be available earlier, extend lifelong, and focus on supporting individuals where and how they live.

Real Life Choices means that the Division will offer more services and supports to families caring for a family member at home. To do this, Division staff will work with families to obtain **Community Care/Medicaid Waiver eligibility**.

Using an **Individualized Resource Tool**, will identify needs and families will create a personalized **Plan of Care**. Families will be allotted an **Individual Budget** based on one of four levels of **Support Time Needed**.

Support Coordination will include helping families make wise decisions in planning for services and facilitation of the Plan of Care through links to service providers and other community resources.

The Division will also provide for the services of a **Fiscal Intermediary** to provide payment for budgeted services, and will monitor consumer satisfaction and overall success of the program.

Real Life Choices was launched in Fall 2003 in the Southern and Upper Central regions. It will phase in expansion to Northern and Lower Central counties.

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